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ABSTRACT

In order to better serve a growing number of handicapped students, Macomb County Community College (MCCC) initiated a formalized program of cooperation with the Bureau of Rehabilitation, an agency of the Michigan Department of Education. The need for this program was initially revealed in a study of services to handicapped students which demonstrated: (1) a marked lack of cooperation between outside agencies and the units within the college which served handicapped students; (2) a lack of understanding on the part of faculty towards the needs of handicapped students and a parallel lack of knowledge about college programs on the part of rehabilitation personnel; and (3) a tendency to view handicapped persons as a homogeneous group rather than as individuals. To correct these problems, MCCC and the Bureau of Rehabilitation instituted an articulation process which, under the direction of liaison personnel from both agencies, utilizes a written form and standardized procedures for the referral of handicapped students and a waiver/release form which allows counselors to share appropriate information about their clients. Additionally, the cooperative program provides for in-service activities involving students, faculty, and agency personnel in cooperative efforts, which, for example, have developed models for the delivery of services to those with hearing, visual, or mobility limitations. (JP)

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BUILDING LINKAGES WITH THE REHABILITATION AGENCY: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODEL PROGRAM

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Effective communication between the rehabilitation agency and the post secondary institution is vital to the success of the student/client. Communication is necessary at the administrative level as well as between counselors and coordinators of service delivery. In order to achieve effective communication and thus maximize benefits to the student/client, the Bureau of Rehabilitation and Macomb County Community College developed the Macomb Model. This model includes a standardized referral process, feedback mechanism, liaison staff responsibilities and opportunities for joint inservice. Implementation of this model has resulted in effective linkages between the college and the agency, better service delivery, greater awareness of the needs and capabilities of handicapped students by the college community as well as increased numbers of handicapped students.

It appears a greater percentage of handicapped students are attending community colleges than four year institutions. Whether students are actually achieving greater success and their needs being met more effectively at the community college is inconclusive. There are, however, advantages to the handicapped student in the two year community college. First, the educational institution is usually close to the student's home and the various support services to the individual has previously utilized. These services may include the rehabilitation agency. Second, many community college campuses tend to be new and relatively free of physical barriers. Third, community colleges are eligible for set-aside funds from the Vocational Education Act; these can aid in providing support services to eligible students. Finally, it might be argued that community colleges are generally accepting of diverse and non-traditional populations.

One of the primary obstacles to providing effective service delivery is the very nature of the open door institution. On the one hand the open door policy encourages access while on the other it creates difficulty for those individuals charged with ensuring program access. Early identification of handicapped students and their needs can be especially difficult.

Macomb County Community College is a large, comprehensive two-year institution situated just to the north and east of Detroit. As a result of a health survey conducted in 1978-1979 the college projected that some 1,000 of its 27,000 students had a handicapping condition, permanent or temporary. Many of these students require some sort of support service.

For the past ten years, Macomb has worked closely with the two local district offices of the Bureau of Rehabilation to serve handicapped students more effectively. However, about four years ago the number and diversity of handicapped students requesting support and the initial impact of Section 504 caused college administrators to reevaluate approaches to handicapped students and resulted in a facilities grant from the Bureau of Rehabilitation, Michigan Department of Education. One of the primary purposes of this particular project was to develop an articulation process between the college and the rehabilitation agency to facilitate communication and achieve greater access to the college for the student client.

An initial review, prior to the writing of a proposal, revealed areas of concern which became the proposal's focus.

Several agencies and various units within the college were providing services to handicapped students, but frequently without coordination and even occasionally at cross purposes. Since the college and the Bureau of Rehabilitation were the principal service providers, their effective linkage was particularly important. A second area of concern focused on physical and programmatic barriers faced by the student/client. These were often a result of a lack of understanding of

student needs on the part of college faculty and administration as well as lack of indepth understanding of college programs and resources on the part of rehabilitation personnel. Provision of inservice to college and rehabilitation staff was one strategy identified to eliminate physical and programmatic barriers. Equally important was the encouragement of frequent communication among service providers and especially with the handicapped students themselves.

There was also a tendency to see and often to treat handicapped persons as a homogeneous group rather than as individuals with unique needs. At the same time programmatic implications for individuals with certain characteristics were identified. Such an identification could become a general model for service delivery to a particular population and would provide a consistent and efficient support strategy.

The linkage between the college and the rehabilitation agency was vital to the establishment of such a strategy because only through clear referrals, effective inservice and good, direct communication, including the student/client, could access be assured.

To insure close coordination between the Bureau of Rehabilitation and the college an articulation process was initiated. Over the past few years this has resulted in far closer and somewhat different linkages than were initially envisioned. Liaisons were designated by both the college and the local Bureau of Rehabilitation district offices. Currently a college special services administrator has general responsibility to coordinate a referral process, to develop inservice for college and agency personnel and to make the agency generally aware of college programs and policy development. As a member of the college 504 Committee, it is his responsibility to relate available agency services to existent college resources and to articulate student needs to the committee.

The two district offices appointed a counselor responsible for liaison with the college. This person coordinates college referrals, introduces new agency personnel to their college counterparts and college programs. The liaison also reviews and recommends the direction further articulation should take between the agency and the college. Initial results of the articulation effort included a written referral form and procedure between the agency and the college Special Services office and a waiver/release that enables counselors to discuss student progress and share class schedules, grades and other appropriate information. These formal procedures strengthened communication channels and have resulted in a much closer day to day working relationship between college special services and agency counselors. The net result for the student/client is the two professionals, often possessed of different skills, are now working together to provide a support system which is conducive to college success.

As people began to talk, the felt needs and concerns of various groups including faculty, counselors, and agency personnel began to surface. These became the subject of inservice activities. For example, Bureau of Rehabilitation staff are inserviced on campus each semester to various college programs. Agency staff have provided inservice to college personnel on social security disincentives to involvement by handicapped students in cooperative education. Students, agency and college staff have provided college teaching faculty orientations to Section 504 and various handicapping characteristics. A direct result of such inservice is greater access to the college by the student/client.

Effective articulation and frequent inservice have led to a broader base for programmatic innovation and the cooperative development of service delivery models between the agency and the college. For example, models for delivery of services to those with hearing characteristics, visual characteristics and mobility limitations have been proposed. These became a basic plan for service to students.

While not every student is supported in exactly the same way, the general guide for service insures more efficient dispatch of details, i.e., securing interpreter services, and is a document that provides continuity across counselors; it can also be used as a point of departure for further programmatic development. One of the important outgrowths of the initial model service delivery development has been cooperative efforts on the part of the college and Bureau of Rehabilitation staff to attack and remedy particular concerns; one recent example is the staff's attempts to increase participation of handicapped students in Macomb's cooperative education program.

Eighteen months have passed since the facilities grant funding ended. The project evolved into an ongoing process. These observations are now offered:

- The referall procedure does work effectively in terms of exchange of relevant information when all steps in the process are followed;
- The procedure needs periodic review, especially in light of counselor turnover at agency offices;
- The quality of agency referrals has been consistently high;
- Agency staff report that clients' needs for support services are met effectively and efficiently;
- There continues to be a need to integrate county high school special needs counselors into the process as another method of identifying potential students;
- The efforts to build a core of knowledgeable and supportive faculty have met with success and continue;
- The responsibilities of liaison staff need to be clearly delineated;
- College staff have become increasingly knowledgeable in ways to deal with specific groups (e.g., deaf and hearing impaired, learning disabled);
- Models of service delivery, once documented, will be improved and can provide continuity despite staff changes

- While a separate office for handicapped students is not always required, overall coordination is. This may be the responsibility of a 504 task force or committee;
- The process of articulation is endless.

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